

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 212

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

DIA WASHDC

USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 2753

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BL, EAID

SUBJECT: ARMED FORCES DECIDE TO SUPPORT BOLIVIAN ELECTION IN
JULY 1978

REF: LA PAZ 2727

1. SUMMARY. BOLIVIA'S ARMED FORCES ANNOUNCED ON APRIL 5 THEIR
FULL SUPPORT FOR RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS
JULY 9, 1978 FOLLOWING A TWO AND ONE HALF DAY MEETING OF MILITARY
COMMANDERS IN LA PAZ. THE ANNOUNCEMENT REPRESENTS A DEFEAT FOR
PRESIDENT BANZER'S EFFORTS, PARTLY DISGUISED, TO PERSUADE THE
MILITARY TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS AND A BIG STEP TOWARD CONSTITU-
TIONAL GOVERNMENT. WE THINK BANZER WILL CONTINUE TO
SEEK SOME VARIATION FROM THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS AND THERE-
FORE THE PROSPECTS FOR JULY ELECTIONS REMAIN FRAGILE. TO SUPPORT
THE ELECTION PROCESS, THE EMBASSY STRONGLY URGES PROMPT APPROVAL
AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF A PL 480 TITLE III WHEAT PROGRAM FOR BOLIVIA
TO BOLSTER THE DECISION OF BOLIVIA'S ARMED FORCES. AN AGREEMENT
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FOR THE FIRST 100,000 METRIC TONS OF WHEAT THEN NEEDS TO BE
NEGOTIATED IMMEDIATELY TO PREVENT A GAP IN WHEAT DELIVERIES
JUST BEFORE ELECTIONS OCCUR. END SUMMARY.

2. THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES ISSUED A STATEMENT AT NOONTIME
APRIL 5 REITERATING SUPPORT FOR RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL
GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS ON JULY 9, 1978. THE

ANNOUNCEMENT FOLLOWED A TWO-AND-ON-HALF DAY MEETING BY SOME 160 COMMANDERS OF LARGE AND SMALL UNITS IN LA PAZ. THE DOCUMENT ALSO STRESSED THE MILITARY'S DESIRE FOR ACHIEVING AN OUTLET TO THE SEA.

3. THE MILITARY DECISION TO REVALIDATE ELECTIONS MARKS A BIG STEP FORWARD FOR THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN BOLIVIA, BUT THE PROSPECTS FOR ELECTIONS IN JULY STILL REMAIN FRAGILE. PRESIDENT BANZER OBVIOUSLY MADE A STRONG EFFORT TO ACHIEVE POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH HE DISGUISED HIS EFFORTS. THE ARMED FORCES DECISION REPRESENTS A DEFEAT FOR BANZER, THE FIRST REAL SETBACK HE HAS RECEIVED AT THE HANDS OF THE MILITARY. HOWEVER, BANZER STILL HAS MEANS OF PUTTING OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF ELECTIONS AND WE BELIEVE HE WILL TRY TO DO SO. WE HAVE BEEN ADVISED BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA (WHO BANZER URGED TO RUN) THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS INDICATED HE WILL DO LITTLE OR NOTHING, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, TO SUPPORT PEREDA'S CAMPAIGN. WHAT BANZER WILL TRY NEXT IS NOT CLEAR.

4. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE LITTLE INSIDE INFORMATION ON HOW THE MILITARY ARRIVED AT THEIR DECISION, WE BELIEVE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR WAS THE STRONG SUPPORT EXPRESSED IN THE LAST FEW DAYS BY THE USG, VENEZUELA AND OTHERS FOR JULY ELECTIONS AND WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT. THERE WAS ALSO STRONG SUPPORT EXPRESSED BY THE LOCAL PRESS AND FROM POLITICAL PARTIES. WITHIN THE MILITARY
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THERE ALSO EXISTED SOME STRONG PRO-ELECTION SENTIMENT. FINALLY, THE FAILURE OF THE BOLIVIAN FSB PARTY LEADERS TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO TO RESUSCITATE THE FSB-MNR MILITARY FRONT WHICH ORIGINALLY BROUGHT BANZER TO POWER IN 1971 MAY HAVE PLAYED A ROLE. THERE WERE SIGNS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS THAT IN THE FACE OF PAZ' REFUSAL, THE FSB LEADERS BEGAN TO REDUCE THEIR OPPOSITION TO PEREDA AMONG THEIR FRIENDS IN THE ARMED FORCES.

5. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE USG CAN NOW HELP TO KEEP THE ELECTION PROCESS ROLLING FORWARD BY PROMPTLY APPROVING A \$90 MILLION PL 480 TITLE III WHEAT PROGRAM FOR BOLIVIA AND ANNOUNCING SUCH APPROVAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. AN AGREEMENT FOR THE INITIAL 100,000 METRIC TONS OF WHEAT UNDER THE PROGRAM SHOULD THEN BE NEGOTIATED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. WHEAT SHIPMENTS UNDER THE PRESENT CCC CREDIT WILL END IN EARLY JUNE AND AN AGREEMENT MUST BE SIGNED VERY SOON IF A GAP IN WHEAT DELIVERIES IS TO BE AVOIDED JUST BEFORE ELECTIONS OCCUR.
BOEKER

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